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ON FURNISHING BEAUTIFULLY.

BY MRS. M. E. HAWES.

THE PIANOFORTE.

ONE of the most prominent and most neglected details in the room is commonly the pianoforte. It is the most prominent because it is so big. Commonly black, and seldom free from gout in its legs, everybody insists on its presence, everybody is made to punish it and their friends' ears, till its outcries might be said to have a self-conscious meaning. In the house of a person who loves beauty, or the dwelling of one who hates music, the ordinary pianoforte is equally out of place. It is grotesquely shapeless in all its forms, whether upright or prostrate. It looks like some mighty slab of "hard-bake" on posts, upon which any attempt at inlaying only recalls the almonds. It is without either dainty lines or pleasant tints. What artist of old would have endured for one day such a vast slab of any material without trying to modify or to decorate it?

People of culture (?) talk wonderful nonsense sometimes. I heard some intelligent folks gravely assert the other day that a pianoforte ought *not* to be beautiful. For were it less than ugly, it would distract the player's mind from his work, and the company's attention from the playing.

So much the worse for the muse—so much the worse for the musician, I say! Were such a preposterous thing true, I should add, the sooner musicians veiled their sweet sounds behind a decent screen the better. But it is *not* true, of course. The beauty and elegance of Mr. Alma Tadema's pianoforte, described by me in my "Beautiful Houses," and that still quaint instrument of Mr. Burne Jones, have never incommoded the celebrated pianistes who have inscribed their names on its lid after praising its tone. And by the time pianofortes are oftener made ornaments, musicians may have got used to them, as a sleeping babe may get used to the scream of a parrot, and may still be able to concentrate their minds on their inspiration—if the inspiration is strong enough.

Not only the color of the instrument, but its whole shape, is capable of improvement. The case contains much waste space. In my book, the "Art of Decoration," I quoted two unusual forms which might be employed—one a form that is really beautiful, and was once in use, under the name of Steward's Euphonic, the other an ingenious novelty not yet carried out, but entirely possible. Let us be bold; let us re-create the whole thing; and having got the main outline right first, new ideas for coloring it will occur to us.

In the late Mr. Burges's house—I must again refer my readers to my "Beautiful Houses"—the whole furniture carried out his principle, borrowed from the medieval fashions, that every article in the room had its own special interest and *raison d'être*. The washstand, the book-case, the mantel-shelf, the bedstead, the window, was each a beautiful object, both in form, color and material. The rich red enamel paint that colored one suite had some precedent in a fine early 17th century suite of furniture at Knole House, described in Mr. Eastlake's "Hints on Household Taste," page 76, which suite itself may have had a classic precedent, for in the 17th century everybody was classic-mad. The brilliant gilding that covered other suites, was directly taken from the blazoned effects which old England loved and may have borrowed from Rome or Persia. The delicate carving on chairs, press or window-frame was revived from most ancient sources. Old Egypt herself, and Solomon's Court, had arrived at the highest ideal of luxury of the age, which we have

since forgotten, but can recall when we like, as Mr. Burges did.

Why, then, is any one object to be the vexatious "rover" in the neat and finished game—least of all one so intimately associated with the fair hand and form of woman, and the tenderest vibrations of sensitive pleasure? Why, when every other thing is required to be pretty, shall obsolete prejudice keep the pianoforte a fright? A blatant symbol of prejudice and inconsistency, a picture of disease, a chartered libertine of ugliness!

There is, perhaps, no one living with courage and originality, as well as a feeling for grace, equal to creating an entirely new form of pianoforte. The late D. G. Rossetti could have done it. Perhaps Wm. Burges could have done it. Mr. Burne Jones might possibly do it; but more than mere love of color or technical knowledge of the instrument is required, and the best hints are to be found in museums of ancient instruments, such as our South Kensington Museum.

KNICK-NACKS.

It would take too much space to enumerate all the various pieces of furniture capable of improvement, and after all I am in the present paper chiefly concerned with the infinitely little "details." I may ask, why are the knick-nacks about a woman's haunts so painfully foolish, uninteresting in a general way? Go into the bedroom and

and lo! of course it falls over at a touch. Most things fall over now-a-days if you only look at them. They are so badly designed, so ridiculously useless in construction, and yet costly, that we can give them no name but that of "knick-nacks."

Why does not the fair student of the beautiful remember that beauty can never be dissociated from utility and appropriateness? Why does she not keep her ribbons in a really handsome casket, her pins on a soft and shapely cushion, hang her brushes of silver and ivory on a humble nail, by a simple string, and let the effect be picturesque? Why cannot some curious vase, durable and solid, be used for ink, and a pretty reed or feather form the pen? Why should even the blotting pad be sordid and disagreeable to sight? and lastly, when sensible people point out the flaw yourself perhaps overlooked, why say vaguely, "Oh, it looks like what it is," as though *that* were an excuse. So does a sulky child look like what it is; but that is no reason why it should not be encouraged to look like something pleasanter.

A room ought to be a picture in itself. All the details ought to be worth notice, or else destroyed. A useful thing, made carefully in a thoroughly good material, is generally not un-beautiful; this is one of the most surprising lessons in the pursuit of Beauty, which seems to run with utility in a continual circle. "A place for everything, and everything in its place," is a proverb true in art as in economy. What is an ornament in one position becomes mere lumber* in another, and what ignorance has banished to the lumber-room may often be brought forth with advantage and take its proper place as an ornament.

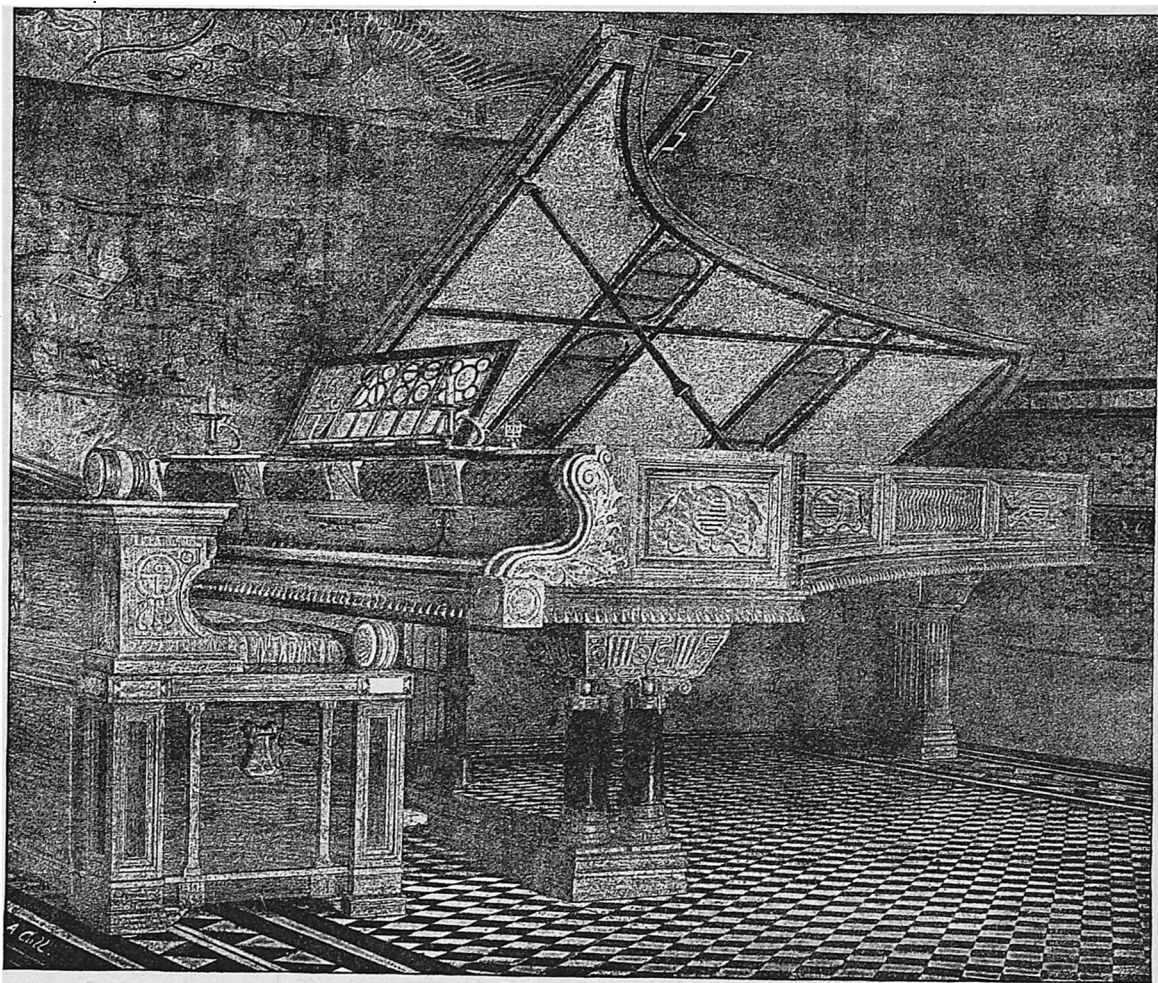
I do not think anything can be considered useless or bad in art *per se*. All depends on our treatment of it. Dark colors are not bad, nor light colors. Gilding is not bad, nor is its absence. Gloss is not bad, nor are dead surfaces. Varnish and color and gold are exceedingly valuable elements, but they are the most difficult to employ beautifully; therefore novices will do well to let them alone. Dead surfaces and monotints are easier to deal with, which is one of the secrets of the popularity of the so-called "Queen Anne" style of furnishing. Much may be learned on the importance of details from a well-furnished French *salle*, such as the beautiful rooms at Versailles and Fontainebleau; still

more may be learned from the pictures of the early masters of the 14th and 15th centuries. Both schools offer the eye the constant and varied charm of brightness and warmth in general, excellence and finish in detail.

Were the importance of details better understood, we should not be trammelled with such cut and dried laws as to orthodoxy in art. No school would fall into *décadence* and corruption. Money would be spent, but not wasted. We have the most splendid materials, the most perfect mechanism at hand, we have the teaching of all the ages, the results of all the experience of all the schools to guide us. Nothing is bad in itself, curves nor straight lines, wreathing ornament nor bareness, monotony nor surprises. The beauty of an artistic effect simply depends upon our treatment of the common property in effects, as the beauty of a building depends on the distribution of common bricks.

* Lumber is a term used in England in a different sense from the American, I believe. We use it as an equivalent for what is useless, at least superseded. A lumber-room is a mere depository for superfluities, chiefly rubbish.

Moorish forms are very popular now-a-days, but they have become so modified, so nineteenth centuryized, that they may be introduced into the most thoroughly modern apartment without the slightest appearance of incongruity or anachronism. The features of the modern moorish consist of lattice work, arabesques, arches and curiously disposed glasses, usually beveled, if plain, and often apparently out of place, or, if colored, in very high and bright tints.



GRAND PIANO AND MUSIC SEAT BELONGING TO L. ALMA TADEMA, ESQ., R. A.

observe the dirty brush and comb; the dropsical pin-cushion of crochet over glazed calico; the uninteresting set of chinaware which contain her powder puff, her tooth paste, her pins and scissors and all the rest of the necessities. Here is a box containing ribbons; what a box! made of varnished paper, with a photograph on the lid, the glass above which is so heavy that it upsets the box whenever the lid is raised. Here is a brush-rack; every time you remove a brush, the balance is displaced and down go all. Her mirror is by no means of a shape to inspire an artist; its material is mere cheap mahogany, heavily varnished, the scrolls and wriggles of its frame are glued fragments, not even carved in the wood itself. Look at her bed! what a bulbous, unsightly, stiffly-draped erection!

Go into her boudoir—look at that frightful inkstand; the whole room has been expensively furnished *à l'antique*, but the escreteiro spoils all. Here is a brass candlestick—that at least is a good standard design. Nay! observe the coarse casting, which has spoilt the anatomy of the original pattern, and joined two portions of the base never meant by its author to approach. Observe, it is not even brass; it is of some specious, easily damaged false metal, which will bear neither use or scouring. The envelope case is artistically vile; the pens are formed to inconvenience the fingers, and yon saucer mounted in ormolu wires to hold stamps—how black it is getting! it will not clean,